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Soviet Defector Accused Of Fabrications in Book

By EDWIN McDOWELL

A magazine article charging that a former Soviet diplomat made up important parts of his best-selling book, with the apparent complicity of the Central Intelligence Agency, has evoked heated denials from the American intelligence community. Moreover, defenders say that even if some dates in the book are incorrect and some passages embellished, the overall thrust — that the author spied for the United States while serving as the senior Soviet official at the United Nations, until his defection in 1978 — is essentially correct.

The story by Edward Jay Epstein, titled "The Spy Who Came in to Be Sold," appears in the issue of The New Republic on sale today. It sets out a lengthy bill of particulars against the book "Breaking With Moscow" by Arkady N. Shevchenko, the highest-ranking Soviet official ever to defect.

Mr. Epstein's article seeks to cast doubt on Mr. Shevchenko's claim that he spied for the United States beginning in 1975, while he was the senior Soviet diplomat at the United Nations, until his defection.

It attempts to debunk Mr. Shevchenko's claim that he furnished the C.I.A. with details of Soviet strategy on arms-control negotiations, including the strategic arms limitation talks.

And it asserts that the "car chases, meetings, conversations, reports, dates, motives and espionage activities" in the book, which has been on the best-seller list for 18 weeks, were concocted to create "a spy that never was."

C.I.A. Issues Response

Mr. Shevchenko, who did not return a message left on his answering machine, is said by his publisher and friends to be out of the country on vacation and unreachable. But last week, while galleys of the Epstein article were circulating in Washington and New York, the C.I.A. took the unusual step of responding publicly to Mr. Epstein's article, saying that Mr. Shevchenko "provided invaluable intelligence information" to Washington and that the C.I.A. "had nothing to do with writing his book."

Nevertheless, the Epstein charge that the book is a fraud caused both the book's publisher and Time magazine, which ran two lengthy excerpts from the book earlier this year, to re-examine its accuracy. Both pronounced themselves satisfied that it is accurate.

But Mr. Epstein, who has written books challenging the Warren Commission conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing President Kennedy, said he sticks by his account. In the magazine article and in telephone interviews, he said the spy fraud was perpetrated in order to produce a "success story" at a time when "the C.I.A. was in disarray" following Congressional revelations of past abuses, and the agency was concerned about K.G.B. espionage successes.

Mr. Epstein's article makes numerous allegations, and cites a number of seeming inconsistencies in Mr. Shevchenko's account. Mr. Shevchenko's inaccessibility and the refusal of some present and former officials to discuss the various matters have greatly complicated the task of independent observers in rechecking the accuracy of many points raised in the article. Nevertheless some of Mr. Shevchenko's assertions that have been questioned by Mr. Epstein can be supported and certain inconsistencies of Mr. Epstein's account have come to light.

Kissinger Cited in Article

For example, a major Epstein claim is that "one former national security adviser to the President" — whom he subsequently identified as former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger — told him "there could have been no such spy as Shevchenko purported to be" without his knowing about it. But Mr. Kissinger did not return a number of telephone calls to his New York office, seeking to verify that claim.

However, Stansfield Turner, who headed the C.I.A. from 1977 to 1981, said in a brief telephone conversation that, "Shevchenko gave good intelligence." And Ray Cline, former deputy C.I.A. director, said that the C.I.A. denial is correct "and the Shevchenko story substantially truthful."

Mr. Epstein, reconstructing a timetable based on incidents reported in the book, says Mr. Shevchenko's spy career could not have begun before 1976. "Yet the book details a wealth of espionage coups Shevchenko accomplished on behalf of the C.I.A. before the end of 1975," Mr. Epstein writes.

The Shevchenko book is vague on dates — as indeed it should be, in the opinion of current and past intelligence officials. And Mr. Epstein is correct that Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, when he was later vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence

Committee, wrote that he learned on Dec. 5, 1975, that Mr. [redacted] told an American [redacted] that he wished to [redacted]

But Senator Moynihan described the Shevchenko as "invaluable," [redacted] to discuss detail [redacted] article, except to re [redacted] Shevchenko "was working for us for a period until that rather dramatic moment" of his defection.

Information on Arms Talks

Mr. Epstein writes that one of those espionage coups claimed by Mr. Shevchenko in 1975 was that of providing information about the strategic arms limitation talks. Yet Mr. Epstein said in conversation that Mr. Kissinger told him he had never heard of Mr. Shevchenko passing along information on those talks. "And if that claim is wrong than the book's a lie even if none of the other details are wrong," he added.

But Strobe Talbott, the Time magazine correspondent who recommended that Time publish the Shevchenko excerpts, and the author of several books on arms negotiations, said he is convinced that the Shevchenko story stands up. "A former intelligence community official with direct knowledge told me one reason he remembered the Shevchenko episode, although he did not know Shevchenko by name, was because this Soviet source at the U.N. was providing information that was useful on arms control," he said.

Mr. Epstein's article describes Mr. Shevchenko's three-page account of a 1976 dinner party at the two-room apartment of Boris Solomatin, the head of the K.G.B. in New York, at which they and Georgi A. Arbatov, the Soviet authority on the United States, discussed President Ford's chances of winning re-election — discussions that he said he relayed to the American case officers.

But "there could not have been such a meeting," Mr. Epstein writes, because Mr. Solomatin returned to the Soviet Union in July 1975, six months before Mr. Shevchenko began his alleged spying for the United States and more than a year before Mr. Arbatov would have come to the United States to appraise the presidential elections.

Discrepancies Not Explained

William Geimer, a former State Department official and close friend of Mr. Shevchenko, concedes that he has no ready explanation for the apparent discrepancy. He said he has not been in contact with Mr. Shevchenko since he left the country early last week. "But my suspicion is that Solomatin came back into the country and Epstein missed it," he said.

Even if that were true, Mr. Epstein said, the apartment that is described in such detail as having been Mr. Solomatin's would then have belonged to his replacement.

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